CLAIMS

1. A method for managing a workflow process to bring execution time for said process at least closer to an expected deadline, said process including a plurality of work nodes and a set of priority levels associated with each work node, said method including the steps of:

generating for each work node a set of expected time to complete (ETC) values for each priority level, each ETC value denoting a cumulative time to complete the process including the time taken by the corresponding node to complete its activity for a selected priority level;

selecting for each work node a priority level that has a corresponding ETC value less than or equal to a remaining time available to meet said deadline; and

executing activities associated with said work nodes in accordance with said selected priority levels to substantially meet said expected deadline.

2. A method according to claim 1 wherein each priority level is selected so that the difference between said deadline and the ETC value is a minimum.

3. A method according to claim 1 wherein said ETC values are generated from historical data collected from completed process instances during a learning phase.

4. A method according to claim 1 wherein said ETC values are generated using formula ETC = $\eta + 2\sigma$ and wherein η is a statistical mean and σ is a statistical standard deviation of values collected during a learning phase.

5. A method according to claim 1 wherein said executing is performed by at least one business object.

6. A system for managing a workflow process to bring execution time for said process at least closer to an expected deadline, said process including a plurality of work nodes and a set of priority levels associated with each work node, said system including:

means for generating for each work node a set of expected time to complete (ETC) values for each priority level, each ETC value including a time taken by the corresponding node to complete its activity for a selected priority level;

means for selecting for each work node a priority level that has a corresponding ETC value less than or equal to a remaining time available to meet said deadline; and

means for executing activities associated with said work nodes in accordance with said selected priority levels such that the said expected deadline is substantially met with a high probability.

7. A system according to Claim 5 wherein each priority level is selected so that the difference between said deadline and the ETC value is a minimum.

8. A system according to claim 5 wherein said ETC values are generated from historical data collected from completed process instances during a learning phase.

9. A system according to claim 5 wherein said ETC values are generated using the formula ETC = $\eta + 2\sigma$ and wherein η is a statistical mean and σ is a statistical standard deviation of values collected during a learning phase.

10. A system according to claim 6 wherein said means for executing includes at least one business object.